Weapon Is Tied To Earlier Killing

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New Orleans

Police yesterday identified the sniper who paralyzed the city with a .44 magnum rifle Sunday and said that his gun was the same weapon that felled two New Orleans policemen on New Year's Eve.

The slain terrorist, his body literally riddled with police bullets, was named as Mark James Robert Essex, 23, a black native of Emporia, Kan.

Essex, a Navy veteran who was given a general discharge "for unsuitable character and behavior disorders," was described by his hometown minister as having returned from his service hitch "hating white folks."

ATTITUDE

"I saw him only once and asked him why he had not been to church, which he had attended regularly since boyhood," the Rev. W. A. Chambers, pastor of the St. James Baptist Church of Emporia, said.

"He told me he thought christianity was a white man's religion," Chambers said. "He had turned militant and he had a very severe hatred toward white people. Something probably happened in the Navy to cause it."

Police Superintendent Clarence Giarrusso said Essex had been living in a New Orleans suburb for the past six months. "The other information we have is nebulous," he said in a lengthy press conference. "There are many loose ends."

Apparently bent on self-destruction after a murderous spree at a downtown hotel here, Essex was cut down on the roof Sunday night after holding hundreds of officers at bay for almost 12 hours.

AP Wirephoto

MARK J. R. ESSEX
A 5-year-old photo

Police recovered his body from atop the Downtown Howard Johnson's Monday afternoon after finally storming the roof and finding, to their amazement, that his presumed companions had vanished.

Yesterday Giarrusso summed up the dilemma by declaring that there is "strong evidence" to suggest that there were other snipers, who somehow escaped, and equally "strong evidence" to suggest that Essex acted alone.

The police superintendent hinted that his officers had turned up some indications that the dead man was tied

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SNIPER'S RIFLE

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to some black militant organization, but he said they were insufficient to warrant disclosure at this point.

VICTIMS

Aside from Essex, six persons were killed and some 20 others wounded in the hail of police and sniper bullets that bounced crazily around the 18-story hotel over the weekend. Three of the policemen hurt Monday were injured by ricocheting chunks of concrete sent flying by police bullets, yet Giarrusso said he found it hard to believe that all of those hurt after Essex was killed were the victims of police gunfire.

"Policemen," he protested, "aren't going to shoot at fellow policeman."

Ballistics tests are far from complete but officials said those conducted so far indicate that two of the victims of the Sunday shooting —Deputy police superintendent Louis Sirgo and Dr. Robert V. Steagall Jr., a hotel guest — were both killed by bullets from the .44 magnum carbine found lying by Essex's side.

Giarrusso added that tests on the same rifle, shattered by police gunfire and then pieced together again, matched the bullets taken from the bodies of two New Orleans Policemen shot on New Year's Eve.

INCIDENT

One of those officers, a black police cadet named Alfred E. Harrell Jr., was killed as he was standing outside police headquarters. The other, patrolman Edwin C. Hosli Sr., was severely injured about 15 minutes later while investigating a reported burglarly just two blocks from headquarters.

According to police, the shootings started at the hotel Sunday morning about half an hour after the reported theft, about two miles away, of a 1968 Chevrolet by a man with a rifle.

The owner of the car, Marvin Alberts, told police he had left it outside his home with the motor running for a brief stop and returned to see the gun-toting thief drive it off.

Major Henry Morris, chief of New Orleans detectives, said the stolen car hit a parked auto, some two blocks from Alberts' home, but then eluded police notice until officers found it Sunday night—on the fourth floor of the Howard Johnson's built-in garage.

The shootings started at 11 a.m. Sunday, about half an hour, Morris said, after the accident involving the stolen Chevy.. By then, police and firemen were responding to a series of fires that had aust erupted at the hotel, apparently set by Essex and perhaps some companions.

Several witnesses have said they saw a black man with a rifle wandering the hallways of the hotel before the shootings; some reportedly stated that the man had a goatee.

A check of Essex's corpse at the New Orleans morgue yesterday showed no goatee.